

SOIL OF LIBERTY

20¢

PUT OUT BY NORTH COUNTRY ANARCHISTS

AND ANARCHA-FEMINISTS

VOL. 2 NO. 1

C.O. - TURKEYS OR TYRANTS ?

by Don Olson

The last year has seen the development of a Marxist-Leninist cadre-type organization which has been attempting to take control of the coops in the North Country. The group calls itself the Coop Organization, as if it were the official organization of the coops. The C.O. has acted with an all-consuming lust for power, justified by their perceived revolutionary infallibility that would make religious zealots envious. Their practice has been characterized by lies, slander, intimidation, force, violence and hate. Since they at first pushed the literature of Joe Stalin and since the C.O.'s practice reminded people of Uncle Joe, they were known as Stalinoids. In their attempts to seize power in the coops the C.O. acts much like the Bolsheviks did after seizing state power in the Russian Revolution. In fact, the following by Maurice Brinton about the Bolsheviks sums up much of what I'd like to say about the C.O.

emphasis on the incapacity of the masses to achieve a socialist consciousness through their own experience of life under capitalism, its prescription of a hierarchically structured 'vanguard party' and of 'centralization to fight the centralized state power of the bourgeoisie', its proclamation of the 'historic birthright' of those who have accepted a particular vision of society (and of its future) and the decreed right to dictate this vision to others---if necessary at the point of a gun--all these will be recognized for what they are: the last attempt of bourgeois society to reassert its ordained division into leaders and led, and to maintain authoritarian social relations in all aspects of human life. (The Bolsheviks & Workers' Control: 1917 to 1921: the State and Counter-Revolution)

(cont. on p.2)

In the struggle for (a truly libertarian society), Bolshevism will eventually be seen to have been a monstrous aberration, the last garb donned by a bourgeois ideology... Bolshevism's



C.O. from p.1

The C.O. gave themselves historical legitimacy by positing a two-line development of the coops. The so-called hippy coops supposedly developed out of the middle-class, moralistic, liberal anti-war movement while they developed, of course, out of an anti-imperialist coop tradition. The only example of the latter which they gave was Matt Eubank's People's Coop Union, a grocery store which was mysteriously fire-bombed in 1970. That venture gave the term coop such a bad name in the North-side black community that the word still cannot be used there.

The essence of the C.O.'s argument against the coops is that since the coops have always carried only minimally processed foods in bulk, the working class is being excluded because they eat packaged convenience foods. The C.O.'s logic concludes: the coops are therefore privately owned by "pure food elitists" of a "lumpen-bourgeois clique." While the food issue is very important, the underlying issue is one of control and power--how the coop's decision-making will be done. The C.O. says that since the working class doesn't have the time to contribute like the "hippies" do, what is needed is democratic centralism. It would be democratic because people could make suggestions and the central committee (or council or Workers Action Committee, etc) would then follow those suggestions. At Powderhorn Coop, they tried a geometric sleight-of-hand, claiming that rather than the council being considered as being over the work groups, the work groups should instead think of themselves as part of a circle and the council merely being in the middle--a horizontal arrangement. The council was, as expected, dictatorial and there is a movement going on now to overturn that structure.

In speaking with C.O. members, they have no understanding of how the structure and the methods used affect what is actually reached in terms of long-run revolutionary goals. Both of these considerations are dismissed as unimportant questions of form--content is what is important. One of the C.O. coordinators at North Country Coop lamented

at a C.O. public meeting about how a concern with process hampered reaching the C.O.'s working class goals. She went bankrupt and the following week arbitrarily overturned the community decision as to which coop warehouse to buy from. The C.O. seems to operate as if it has received a Mandate from Heaven to act as the agent for the working class and therefore, everything it does is legitimate and good.

Ever since the People Warehouse was forcefully seized, many people have wondered if there wasn't some other connection that wasn't readily apparent or acknowledged. One was a possible connection with R.U.--i.e. Revolutionary Union, now the Revolutionary Communist Party. R.U. was at the very



same time period (May 1975) taking over a number of movement organizations around the country. No connection has yet been established with R.U., and so most people just put it as a coincidence of tactics used by Marxist-Leninist-Maoist-Stalinist groups and that it was just "normal" for them to seek domination and control over other organizations.

Many people also wondered whether P.L. (Progressive Labor) wasn't involved because the whole scene was reminiscent of P.L.'s takeover of S.D.S. in 1969 and because the political heroes were the same (altho since then Mao has been dropped by P.L.). I know this is not



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BACKGROUND OF COOP STRUGGLE:

by Bob Bady

During the past ten months there has been much accusation, much turmoil and some violence within the Twin Cities cooperative movement. The impression I have is that much of the information reaching other parts of the country has been unclear. Perhaps in some places our struggle is viewed as some sort of personal in-fighting, or in others as a question of Twinkies versus brown rice. Neither of these is the case. What we are involved in is a very grass roots struggle for power, of decision making, of violence and non-violence, of cooperation and manipulation.

The cooperative movement here is about six years old. Through a steady decentralized pattern it has grown to include 16 store front food cooperatives, two coop bakeries, 2 bulk dry food warehouses (probably a temporary situation), an herb and spice warehouse, dry goods store, 3 cafes, a bike coop and a number of other cooperative style collectives. The economic aspect of our cooperative movement has become increasingly impressive with the overall business of these coops well into million dollar figures annually.

The coops here have never had an over-riding structure or a centralized decision-making body. The dominant feeling has been that concentration of power has dangerous consequences and should be avoided. Likewise there has never been one "coop line." Some coops have always carried regular supermarket foods, some have restricted to whole, bulk foods. There are coops with boards of directors and coops with looser decision-making methods. Some coops are "counter culturish"; some definitely

aren't. As such we've always had some factionalism, people seeing somewhat diverging directions for the coops. However, by and large people were cooperating and working together, at least to the extent that growth of the movement demonstrates.



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on anarcha-feminism

by Fluffy Golod



I could almost hear my brains sizzle as I read and re-read the paper on anarcha-feminism. I was over-joyed to know that women in my own city were serious anarchists. I looked forward to meeting and working with them, to an easing of the political loneliness and frustration I felt in relation to so much of the radical community in this city. But I was annoyed by the vague generality of the paper and found myself warring with the language which is inclined towards the dogmatism and abstraction I'd campaigned against so unsuccessfully in the past.

Because anarchist ideas are so deeply important to me, because I am stuck with my own radical commitment in spite of my cranky cynicism, and because I love and respect the women who wrote the paper, I feel obliged to speak out my deepest criticisms of the paper so that I can work most confidently with all of you, unhampered by reservations or scepticism.

I need to retrace my own political past a bit in order to give clear ground for the things I want to say. All my political work has been with feminists. Although I was first radicalized by the anti-war movement and by hippies, I was unable to fit myself into any concrete anti-war work, mostly because I had a baby and enormous responsibilities to finish school and, you know, make something of myself. I didn't have the time to hang out and fit myself in. The defiant, colorful, freedom-loving hippies I knew attracted me but I was characterologically incapable of being a hippie, ambitious and mouthy as I was and am.

But feminism spoke to every part of my character and social situation. It helped me describe my miserable school experience, the terrible conflict I felt between wanting to be smart and important in the world and wanting to be pretty and feminine and loved and desired. The two seemed irreconcilable to me. My early adult years found me haphazardly educated, practically incapable of serious study or thought, trapped in a boring marriage which had been entered accidentally and desperately and, most frighteningly, responsible for the future of a small child who I loved but feared because her needs seemed so crushing to my own vague hopes. Feminist ideas and models gave me the impetus to crash out of my marriage and begin to think about other ways to live my life. They legitimized the preference I'd always felt for female conversation and company. Feminism did not mitigate my need for approval and attention from men but it made me conscious of the self-defeating and phoney ways I related to men and strengthened me intellectually and psychologically so that I shed some of my worst defensive postures. Ironically, in the course of taking myself seriously as a woman, I slowly learned genuinely friendly responses to men.

But I wanted to work for feminist ideals politically as well as make use of them to help me personally. I worked hard to help ram the Women's Studies program through the resistant University bureaucracy and fought the good fight to get childcare on campus. I did these things because, it seemed to me, they needed to be done. I was naive politically. Once Women's Studies became an actu-

...a response to the Anarcha-Feminist paper

(see S of L , vol.1 no.1)

RULES OF THE

We know not who wrote the following, but it has a nice style. A reader said that it was handed out to the Coop Organization and NAM at their "pep rally" before they marched on Mill City Food Coop, thinking they were going to take it over. Over a hundred and fifty Mill City supporters linked arms and defended the store. The 40-50 C.O. people left after an hour of fruitless pushing and shouting while the defenders sang songs and stood their ground.

A LETTER FROM A FRIEND

You guys. Last night there was a meeting of the entire working class, some of which (who the rest of us hissed at) came marching in with an orange banner. "Hey!" we all yelled, "Bad deal! This is the working class, wear red," we said. "What the fuck."

"Don't be snotty!" they were yelling too and said how they were tired of always that same color. So, half the night, people were being huffy, arguing over whose job was hardest and who worked the most and some with easy jobs were saying how secretly they all their lives liked pink and purple and turquoise and other colors which, if the bosses and the slavemasters, the tricksters and adventurers didn't plaster them over our walls and museums to keep our minds confused and off the problem of marching single-mindedly against our common class enemies, we would've quit looking at them long ago.

After awhile, I got to say, "Wait a minute. Shut up!" for I called the meeting about a problem I was having and one of our rules in the working class is, if you got a problem, everybody's got it, even if its dull, about false teeth or something, even the jerks have to come to the meeting and listen and help you work it out. But still, they was nervous and clenching their teeth and shuffling around, some even talking about how those guys with the orange banners shouldn't ever be invited to another meeting. "OK," I says, "we go on slow time and everyone gets a milisecond to say what's bothering them."

Christ, the gripes and griefs that came rolling out of those people then was like thunder and lightening and the old movies with the sea, angry and splashing against the rocks of abandoned lighthouses, and we was all having a wonderful time for there is nothing sweeter than the voice of the working class, raising its cry for justice and articulating the evils and discontents of its times. So, we would raise our hands and shout and hiss, and other times weep softly, or gnash our teeth and beat our heads against the floor. We were fine instruments being played upon by centuries of bad times and the tunes, though familiar, were new each time and the tales would touch feelings we had almost forgotten. We found ourselves united with our mothers and uncles and fathers blown away in the wars. And all the little ones who got bit by rats when they were infants and never got to come to meetings and say anything. We were weak and pitiable and strong and undefeated. The old people too got up to say how miserable life used to be but how they could get cigars and coney islands for a nickle so you didn't notice it so much.

After everyone was finished I said, "OK, what's up is our representatives in Minneapolis have fallen into bad times and they're yelling and fighting with each other about what kind of food we like best and they're ready to smack each others heads with clubs about whose gonna sell it to us."

"So what," someone said "those guys are always yelling and fighting with each other."

"Well," I says, and I was nervous about it for we got a rule in the working class against sticking our noses in other people's business and ages ago, everyone decided it was best not to monkey around with the problems of the representatives thinking that eventually they'd figure things out. "I'm gonna write them a letter," I says, "and tell them what I think."

Everyone was giving me hell then. Such a cry went up! And the stories started, everyone telling about someone they knew

WORKING CLASS...

who got mixed up with the representatives, how they got raped or stabbed or beaten, or how they were chased out of their countries or made to stand up in the world and tell lies and if they didn't live a certain way, no-one would talk to them. One woman whose marbles were loose said they ate their own babies.

"Look," they said, "we do everything we can to make their lives comfortable. We listen to them piss and moan year after year about whether the shape of life is round or square, whether its coloured orange or green, (that I figured was snippy to the guys with the orange banner and unworking-class-like), whether they ought to go forward or backward, or sit down altogether. And they're always coming around being bossy with their dumb ideas telling us how if we weren't confused we'd run our revolution, whats the best thing to do given such and such and how everything will be after its all done. Those guys are crazy," they said, "you shouldn't be hanging around with them."

I must have looked stricken then for I've been crazy myself and they all knew it and people came and put their arms around me and were saying, "Hey brother, we didn't mean it like that." and other kindnesses to make me feel better, for one of the rules of the working class is everyone hurts if you put down your brothers and sisters for their mistakes and confusions.

When we got over hurting I says, "Yes, I know, but these people are my friends. Whenever you're out on the street they pet your dog and say, "have a nice day," and smile and their eyes shine with the beauty and innocence of youth." I told them how you'd come together years ago and figured out on your own, with only puffs of insight and whiffs of inspiration and no help from the great spirit of the working class, that people were eating bad food and how you set up your own stores to do a better job and what was wrong with that I asked the meeting.

"Nothing!" they said and all cheered, like if your baby had taken its first step and you were proud of it.

"Then," I said, "half of them said the other half were not really representatives of the working class or they'd sell us crap food we like to eat and not look down on us so much, and if the others didn't get out of the stores, they were gonna kick the shit out of them," and they all groaned and looked discouraged, like your baby just fell flat and maybe broke out a tooth. "Thats the way they are!" they shouted. "Leave them alone!"

"But half my friends are each on different sides," I said and they saw it wasn't a fake problem, for one of the rules of the working class is you don't snub your nose

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from p.6

at your friends problems. "Don't write the letter anyway," they said, "you'll just get yourself in trouble," but they told me lots of things to say if I did, for everyone at the meeting had a solution to the problem and they were everyone different but mostly sensible, coming as they did straight from the mouth of the horses that know whats up.

"They can each take half of each store," one said, "and they can laugh and make fun of the people on the other side who are selling the wrong stuff."

"Let the guys who want to move into the stores but nobody else talk to them," someone else said.

"Why don't half the guys get stores across the street and put up signs saying theirs is the true store and the others are piss turtles." another said.

I couldn't begin to tell you all the solutions that came up, and good ones too, some of them almost fun for one of the rules of the working class is never lose your sense of humor, it being your most dependable friend and subject to the other rules regarding friendship. So, whenever we get a chance to rest up from fixing things up and making sure the rich got plenty of fresh orange juice and all the things they need to keep comfortable so they don't get mad and blow us up or murder our children, we like to joke, though some are against it, claiming jokes are a waste of time.

So, "yes," I said, "I'll write the letter but me, I'm not gonna tell them how to run their operation." It is a pain to buy good food at the coop and then have to go to the Red Owl for the shit food. That's two trips. And then, too, along with the good food we have to hear people harp a about their revolution or their transformation and what we, the working class ought to do therefor. We're used to that though. Its not such a bother. We expect it and would probably feel uncomfortable without it. It is a mosquito bite, we rub the sting away.



But no matter how much the rest of the working class laugh and chortle at you guys, when you start cracking each others heads, to me, a friend, that's serious. We got a rule in the working class that heads get knocked on only over crucial matters and then rarely, when all else fails, and never between people who have ate together, slept together, been friends.

So, "yes," I says, "I'm gonna write the letter and say get it together better however you can." Those skulls you are about to crack are human skulls, the skulls of your brothers and sisters, and you know yourself nobody appreciates a good snowball fight or a football game or everyone bitching and yelling and smacking down each others ideas than us, there's nothing better to fill up extra time. But a skull is not an idea. One of the rules of the working class is you can always smack down a bad idea, a small force of intelligence and sensibility can knock down a regiment of them. 40 lbs. of common sense can knock off an army. They have so little life in them, they don't bleed or hurt like your brothers and sisters.

A Friend

LETTERS

Comrades,

Here's ten bucks. It took me awhile. If you need some help I'd be glad to lend a hand. I think it's real important we keep this newspaper going.

Well, here's a thing I found that Woody Guthrie wrote:

"Some fellers seem to say that if you work good and hard down here on earth you'll get a damn good meal when you're dead, too dead to enjoy it. Well, for me, I would rather have my pie here while I can still taste it. I don't care nothin' about it after I'm so dead and rotten that maggots will be a pickin' my teeth.

Some of the preachers that promise you hamburgers in the hereafter get on my nerves; what I'd really like to do part of the time is to give 'em a hunk of blackberry pie right in the face.

Preachers can go hungry if they think it helps, but I know when I was drivin' a tractor on Bill Phillips' farm down in Jericho, Texas, well, I needed groceries right that minute and I says to myself: 'What good does it do to grease a tractor after the cussed thing has wore out and fell apart?' Same way with a hard workin' man, you give him groceries to take care of his stomach and his soul will take care of itself. If your soul is eternal, it won't git lost, and if it's everlasting, it won't git hungry...Groceries now is what I believe in."

groceries, huh? well, take care.

Clay Bartholow

There is to be another May Day Parade in Minneapolis this year on May 1st. The push for setting it up last year came from the Powderhorn Puppet Theater and the parade was a combination of huge puppets and politics. It is happening again this year and I would like to suggest that the black flag be flying and that we be part of the parade. Don Olson, for info 722-6612

Dearest Comrades,

Greetings! Enclosed you will find \$1 for five copies of #2 of Soil of Liberty. The overall content is, again, good; and we enjoyed reading the paper.

In the letter section we came across a very disturbing letter by a R-Yves Breton from Montreal. We would like you to print this letter, if you have the room in the next issue of Soil of Liberty.

We feel it is unfortunate that we have to use such a hard language in this letter to Mr. R-Yves Breton from Montreal or maybe we should not feel bad since Mr.

Breton felt justified in using the slanderous article that was put into FREEDOM against comrade Dolgoff (Mr. Breton, we do enjoy FREEDOM and usually agree with most that it prints so do not feel that we are waging an indirect struggle with the English comrades in our defense of Dolgoff, whom we also disagree with in his uncritical support of the Spanish comrades), but we feel that Mr. Breton is talking through his hat.

One, we feel this way because using an article from a Stalinist newspaper does not mean we support its analysis of event or its "revolutionary" theory, what it simply means is that the article was well-written and researched and given from a non-sectarian viewpoint.

Mr. Breton, does it mean that we should be ideological purists all the time? Does this mean we should not agree with a well-written article even though it was printed in a Maoist paper? Do not be a flaming fool! We are hardly about to make an alliance with the Stalinists or any other authoritarians because we use an article that was written by one of them. As for trying to use the historical example of the butcher-

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letters, cont.

ing of our libertarian comrades in Russia/Ukraine, it is totally absurd, Mr. Breton please use reasoning. You also say that the Soil of Liberty comrades are confused. Look at yourself!

Two, Mr. Breton, you say that the article on anarcha-feminism was non-anarchist from the start to the finish. Can it be because it was given from an anarchist-communist viewpoint? Is this viewpoint

(anarchist-communist) threatening to your sense of individuality? Is there anything wrong with people (in this case, women) trying to connect their feelings and anarchism, and trying to show the relationship between the oppression they face and how left-wing anarchism can be a guiding force in this fight against oppression? Sexism is both anti-gay and anti-feminist and goes hand in hand with the present oppressive social order and in being social revolutionaries there is nothing wrong in connecting feminism with anarchism.

Mr. Breton, you say that connecting feminism with anarchism is like connecting black nationalism (in all its forms) to the social revolutionary struggle. That is a lot of horse shit (!) because women are not asking for a separate nation, like some black nationalists want in the southern parts of the United States, but are trying to show that feminism is an integral part of the social revolution and should not be overlooked or underplayed.

Mr. Breton, we feel that connecting feminism to anarchism is not applying separatist theory, but integrating a piece of the social revolution into left-wing anarchist theory.

As for your individualism, well...You say that the individual comes first, and we totally agree with you on this point; but if individualism becomes too strong, then it tends to lean towards reaction and self centrism and laissez-faire capitalism like Murry Rothbard and company. So, Mr. Breton, we urge you to look at what you wrote because we feel (and we are not you and we cannot judge your motives or your theory) that this letter/statement tends to be rightist at best and reactionary to anarchist thought at worst. Yes, we

may be harsh; but we say it so that we will not lose another anarchist to extreme individualism.

No, Mr. Breton, we are not saying that we have the "correct line" or that our "brand" of anarchism has no flaws; but we feel that the letter you wrote was quite absurd and "in poor taste". We welcome your comments and criticisms with an open mind.

Faternally,

Solidarity Collective
Bristol, Rhode Island

To the Editors:

I object to your putting words or saying things that I have not said or thought. (Re: your reply to my letter in issue #2.) That "obtaining facts from other sources is not a corollary to supporting their political views." As you put it, I wholly agree. But by not identifying the source when you can is tacit approval of the same sources. In fact, it changes everything!

Further, to say that I (re: the writer) advocates a return (nostalgia fan?) to the mistakes(?) of the 60's, a male (white) supremacist (sic) left, where the interests of the people(?) are ignored", is hogwash, reminiscent of editorial policies conducted by one self-appointed censor of the anarchist movement (re: Fred Woodworth of The Match, Tucson, Arizona). This person being so ethic that his last (unfortunately, he is still alive!) reply to me was "go to hell".

Now, getting back to your attribution of my so-called un-anarchist intentions. First, no mistake was made by the Lefties of the 60's--Why?--They were archist people--their remnant degenerated into Cubanism or Maoism or other Marxism, from these foul vapors emerged the anarchists! The movement was never libertarian but an amalgamation of different ideologies--

c.o. - tyrants? from p.2

the case, but many people groaned because it was as if the C.O. hadn't learned (or ignored) the lessons of 5-6 years ago, the two main ones which came from feminism, namely that the personal is political and that there is a better political style than a macho power trip.

Because the C.O. was so devisive and disruptive, an obvious question came up concerning police agents. My own interest in this was very much heightened by reading an interview with a former F.B.I. agent in Tampa, Fla. (Guardian Feb 4, 1976). One notices a certain similarity with local events. They had an all-cop front organization called Red Star Cadre whose job "was to experiment with and carry out tactics of disruption against people's struggles" and to "promote splits and cause confusion." "The functions of Red Star were: to conduct intelligence on left, trade union and community activists..., to bust up trade union struggles and popular movements, and to promote terrorism. The organization consistently functioned with a 'left' cover and attempted to encourage untra-'leftism' as a general tactic." The F.B.I. encouraged the agent "to attack other activists with a campaign charging some as being "Maoist dope dealers," altho here it was an anarchist so attacked. But there is no evidence and so the C.O. must be dealt with on a political level as if they are "honest sectarians". Of course the C.O. is not an all-cop organization but many people suspect agents at some level of their hierarchy. The C.O. has been very intent from the beginning to preserve their anonymity, getting very upset when names are used in leaflets or in articles in the coop newspaper, Scoop. Using names is supposedly doing the work for the F.B.I. which is also the reason for keeping their leadership secret. The C.O. naively (in my opinion) claims publicly that because they are secret they are protected against infiltration, as if this had ever stopped agents in the past or that they didn't already have agents involved. The C.O. tries to be faceless and nameless, the opposite of the more open type of revolution based on face-to-face democracy that has characterized much of the development of the coops. But what the anonymity actually did was to try and allow

the C.O. to throw sand in our face, trying to make it difficult to check out their charges and accusations concerning one coop or event where it was important to know who actually was involved.

Among the problems involved with dealing with the C.O. is that many had been former fellow coop workers, friends, lovers---people you'd known for awhile. But as they got transformed (converted) we would joke about how it was like in a science-fiction movie and the pod people would take over your neighbor. Real strange. Some of the people involved had been long-time coop heavies and some not so heavy--some of whom came out of the virtually-unknown Powderhorn and Selby Freedom Brigades. They operated with a more-revolutionary-than-thou attitude and felt (in 1975!) as if they were the only ones who knew about imperialism. As one of the soon-to-be-transformed critics exclaimed, "You're like people who've just discovered communism and you're running around trying to convert everyone."



In a somewhat unusual development, Minneapolis NAM (New American Movement) is now part of the C.O. because NAM was out Marxist-Leninized in its rhetoric. NAM had for years studied and debated and had finally started doing something by setting up a Workers Rights Center and doing unemployment organizing. But then, just as they were starting to get some response from workers, NAM closed it all down to go back for more debate and study. Some critics say that when NAM got face-to-face with the working class, they got scared of rejection and so withdrew again. It was soon thereafter that the "rising force" in NAM purged 9 of its members--the worst four of which had been the "rotten core of reaction". That was last December and since then, NAM has essentially dissolved itself and accepted C.O. leadership.



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Early last spring a new faction, consisting largely of long time coop workers, emerged and named itself the "Coop Organization" (C.O.). They were sharply critical of the Twin City coops, branding them as havens for hippy food purists and elitists. They leveled sharp scorn against the movement because it didn't relate to the needs of the working class. Claiming to be disciplined Marxist-Leninist-Stalinists, they evolved their own plan for the coops that included tight centralization of leadership and economic power under the umbrella of a rather vaguely presented "democratic centralism."

Last spring the slogan of the C.O. was "criticism, discussion and transformation." In March and April there was much criticism and discussion. In May violent takeover was substituted for transformation.

The focal point of the C.O.'s attack became Peoples Warehouse. This warehousing distribution operation had become impressively large since its beginnings four years before. During the spring of 1975 it was grossing \$100,000 a month worth of business. The continuing growth of area coops held prospects for Peoples Warehouse to continue growing by leaps and bounds. Already by raising mostly small, personal loans and donations the coops were well past the half-way point toward buying the \$75,000 building Peoples Warehouse was located in.

In an attempt to deal with the power that was accumulating in this warehouse an organization was created to overview its operation. Created in early 1974 the Policy Review Board was a large body of representatives from 40 or so coops. From its inception it was besieged with troubles. It evolved into a large body of poorly informed people. Its meetings became bogged down and confusing. Consequently, they were largely useless at decision-making.

At last May's weekend Policy Review Board meeting the C.O. decided to exploit this weakness. Saturday they packed the meeting and employed a variety of demagogical tactics that prevented any business or communication from taking place.

Sunday the C.O. sent a representative to the meeting to inform us that they had taken the warehouse check book and were closing the warehouse down for 3 days to transform it. Obviously, it had been the C.O.'s analysis that by taking over the warehouse, the most central point in this coop system, they could gain significant influence over all the coop stores.

Initially we reacted by freezing the checking account and planning a non-violent reoccupation of our warehouse. At a gathering at Peoples Warehouse that Sunday night we planned to return the next morning and carry on business as usual. Eight or nine people remained in the building all night. At 3:30am on Monday the C.O. in full strength (30-40 people) barged into the warehouse wielding pipes and ripping out phones. With violence and intimidation they forced all out of the building.

The C.O. first denied their pre-dawn raid but later admitted to it as a justifiable act of revolution. The reaction amongst the overwhelming majority of coop people was first disbelief and then outrage. Almost immediately a coop boycott was begun against buying from the new occupiers of Peoples Warehouse. Realizing that they couldn't exist without a base of coop support the C.O. softened its approach. There were meetings, and superficial reconciliation occurred. The C.O. saw it had attempted more than it could handle, and the coop community was too freaked out to react concretely, so a temporary equilibrium resulted.

Through late spring and early summer this equilibrium was maintained. However, the gap of distrust between the coops and the warehouse was steadily widening. New warehouse decisions concerning financing, food stocking policies and pricing were being made without any coop input. The C.O. was sucking financial support from the coops in an attempt to finance their political fantasies. By late summer there was a flurry of coop meetings concerning re-vitalization of the movement.

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The final Policy Review Board met in late September--it was a showdown. If the Policy Review Board was to have no say in Peoples Warehouse then the coops wouldn't support Peoples Warehouse. The manner of the C.O. was much the same as at the May Policy Review Board. The difference was that many of the rest of us were prepared--overprepared. There was rhetoric and declaration, anger and despair. Some coop people went to this PRB expecting it to be the circus it was; others needed to be convinced for a final time that the C.O. was more intent on manipulation than cooperation.

At the end of the meeting 30-40 representatives got together and vowed to have nothing more to do with the C.O. and the warehouse they had taken over. We decided to immediately begin a new warehouse operation. We had two significant goals: to prove that the power of the coops lies in the hands of many people and it can't be seized by a few dozen dogmatists, and to learn from our past mistakes and create a better warehousing structure. For many of us it was hard to kiss Peoples Warehouse off; we had all worked hard to build it. On the other hand we were all tired of working in a hopelessly bankrupt situation and in building a new warehouse we could all work together again cooperatively.

DANCe, the Distributing Alliance of the North Country*, began operating as an alternative to Peoples Warehouse during the end of September. Initially most Twin Cities coops did their business with DANCe and as the fall progressed more and more coops switched to DANCe.

Because of lack of business, by Christmas Peoples Warehouse was in poor financial shape. The C.O. strategy had failed. They had thought they had taken over the focal point of the coops but they now found out that the focal point was expendable, and we were capable of regenerating what we needed. This realization coupled with a failing financial situation spurred on a new round of C.O. activity in December and January.

In December the C.O. made a call for ideological unity behind the C.O.'s "vanguard ideology." There was no response to this as people found little or no basis for ideological unity with the C.O. In early January the C.O. issued an ultimatum for DANCe to close down in 24 hours and turn its assets over to Peoples Warehouse. They also began a campaign of terrorism and hooliganism, probably responsible for firebombing one coop and successfully destroying its truck, and did fail in attempts to violently take over two other coops after they had beaten up workers and thrown them out.

The response of the coop community to these most recent attacks was for the most part non-violent and non-reactionary. Large numbers of people turned out to support different coops that were attacked, further isolating the politics of the Coop Organization from the cooperative movement in the Twin Cities.

There is much local speculation as to the origin and intent of the C.O. There are many who feel the group must have some governmental roots. Indeed their activity and rhetoric seems at times to be provocateur-inspired. However, at this point it's all speculation, nothing can be proven.

One thing is clear, almost all the individuals in the C.O. are largely motivated by extreme frustrations, much of it in their personal lives. What's happened here is largely an example of people divorcing personal reality from political reality; of people becoming frustrated, being

* The name came from a quote by Emma Goldman that someone had put on the wall of that PRB meeting, "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution."

ity, I saw it co-opted by administrators and female faculty using their gender as a way of making a niche for themselves at the . The classes were often just as boring, large and competitive as any I'd experienced before.

I saw graduate school as a dead-end and left but continued to work for childcare on campus because I knew how important it was. That effort, too, was co-opted. We got a center, care for 70 children. But the center was seen as the final goal, a "victory", and there was no coherent group to push for more. Complicated relations between administrators, liberal goody-two-shoes, conservative leftists and well-intentioned but innocent types like me screwed that one up. I knew that political ideas more specific than feminism had affected those efforts. I set myself to figure out my own politics more clearly and to find other women who I could work with more confidently.

This brought me to the Women's Union. Socialism was one of those words which I equated with SWP and boring leaflets. I preferred to say that I was a radical and leave the technicalities to others. But I was attracted to the Union because the women were warm and seemed to share a political ideal above and beyond their relation to issues. I found the language of their political principles boring but I agreed in a general way with the idea that women's problems need to be understood in terms of all kinds of political oppression. Socialist-feminism seemed more generous and practical than radical feminism and more committed to women's lives and feminist process than other socialist types who only used a feminist issue as an organizing vehicle, never really addressing deeper problems. I wouldn't have used the word libertarian at the time but the dedication to small groups and the commitment to a plurality of concerns made intuitive sense to me.

But I found myself at odds with the language used by socialist-feminists, at odds with what I thought then was a romantic attraction to the revolutions of China and Cuba. The anti-imperialist focus of much of the work seemed guilty and unlikely to produce creative, immediate responses to women's lives. Finally, I couldn't swallow the abstract, rather grandiose insistence on a "correct analysis" which we could discover

and implement to make a revolution. But the Union helped me develop much of my political seriousness to take seriously much larger consideration than had ever been my wont before.

I began to read a little anarchist writing. For a long time, I walked a kind of political tight-rope, knowing those writings expressed what I really thought but trying to work them into the activity of the Women's Union and the Left in this city. The Socialist-Feminist conference brought the conflict to a head. I realized that I had been operating off a completely different set of expectations than most of the women working on the conference. I saw myself as a kind of knowledgeable co-ordinator, willing to put in time to bring women together to share their experiences and ideas. I'd hoped to learn some practical working schemes for change and some theory to guide those projects.

But the other conference planners saw themselves as leadership and were threatened by the diversity and self-assertion of women who came to the conference. They saw the conference as some crystalizing event which would bring Socialist-Feminism to the fore and launch it as a national, cohesive political forces. While I shared their opposition to the sectarian madness of many of the women there and advocated a fairly rigorous exclusion of sectarians, I also saw that the conference planners often could not distinguish between a sectarian power play and a legitimate request for more participation and room to air different ideas. And I saw that their own Marxist-Leninism made them susceptible to the attacks on their leadership credentials because they really were not clear on just how or why they were different from and better than other political voices of that time.



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Then I read the Anarcha-Feminist paper. I came to it tired, discouraged and confused. In some ways, that political misery has only increased in the wake of the Co-op organization's assault on Left work here. But the latter force has impelled me to state my own ideas more forcefully and give whatever energy I have left to make the anarchist ideas presented the best and brightest possible.

My major problem with the paper is the use of the word "ideology". I find ideology to be a constricting, self-limiting construct.

I know that we exist inside a dominant ideology which we need to understand and expose and that we need to define our own principles and social remedies. This amounts to the development of an anarchist or feminist ideology. But ideology as it is put forward by the Left usually amounts to a formulaic unrealistic set of guide-lines which define the world narrowly. Ideology is usually expressed abstractly, propelled along by "musts" and "shoulds". We need to avoid the falsely scientific, doctrinaire world-view which so much ideological thinking promotes.

Specifically, I think that the attempt to construct an ideology dried the paper up and led to generalizations rather than concrete examples and moving pleas for a humane, flexible approach to revolutionary work.

I'd like to examine a few of the generalizations which I found most vague or misleading. This won't be an exhaustive critique, just a few examples of the problems we need to tackle.

First of all, the paper cites "freedom of association" as a vital anarchist principle. But what is freedom of association? How is it different from other ways in which people are organized? What are some examples of how it has worked in practice? If it's such a good idea, why does it have so little currency?

The paper asserts that a combination of anarchist principles and feminist ways of operating would result in a "framework for total personal, political

and social revolution." I suggest, first of all, that "total" liberation is almost inconceivable for most of us and that we fool ourselves and fail to convince others by such blanket statements. What might it feel like to be personally liberated? How would that work in terms of our relationships with children, old people? What would happen

to our current notions of love or ambition? And what are the exact distinctions between social, political and economic problems and solutions?

The paper says that anarchist theory asserts the basic good, constructive nature of human beings. I know that most anarchist writing has a sunny, optimistic glow to it. Is this, perhaps, one of the reasons why anarchism seems anachronistic and unlikely to most of our contemporaries? What can we do to promote practical, hard-headed anarchist schemes so that we're not dismissed as sweet but ineffectual utopians?

One very basic problem which the paper needs to clarify is just whose anarchism and whose feminism we're talking about. Part of my problem was some puzzlement about just who the paper was addressed to. Other anarchists? Feminists? Marxist-Leninists? It contains many allusions to such concepts as "statism", "hierarchy", and "efficiency" all classical anarchist pot-shots at Leninists and the structural similarities between communists and "democratic" state structures. I agree, but, if the paper is addressed to women who've moved toward Leninist ideology, then it must be scrupulous about explaining what exactly the anarchistic alternative to a given centralized concept is, how it would work, why it is better. At this point, we're bucking history, and we really must be concrete in order to win any audience there.

If the paper is addressed more generally to a feminist audience, then it should be more explicit about what revolutionary feminism is and how it's different from other kinds of feminism. Also, each principle of anarchism needs to be dissected concretized and presented in a

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sympathetic, colorful, and tangible language. Feminists are justifiably suspicious of Left rhetoric-they fear co-optation. This paper offers no real alternative to socialist-feminism in terms of spirit or practicality.

Feminism is an idea about how things might be better for women and finally for men. Feminists have offered some analysis of families, and sexual relationships which build from but are deeper and more penetrating than most anything out of Left or psychological theory. But these insights have led them full circle back to other, older revolutionary criticisms of society. These rediscoveries seemed so pressing, so vital to me when they directly described my own life, that I felt that I and other "women's-libbers" were the first to really feel, really know.

I think this led many of us to an insistence on feminism as a politics. We took our involvement in a social movement and tried to make out of it a set of principles which would describe all the world's problems in terms of ourselves. Inevitably, this led to radical feminism which asserts biology as the primary contradiction, women as the first slave and nigger and, as day follows night insists on woman as the vanguard of the revolution.

The paper does suggest that anarchist theory has been around awhile and that it is the most useful political perspective for realizing feminist goals and for liberating most people. We should talk more about what feminist projects--the consciousness-raising group, the early Redstockings, all the feminist collectives--were anarchistic, how they exemplified freedom of association. We should talk about feminist organizations such as NOW, which have imitated traditional American political structures, have failed feminists and about how separatist theorists have missed the boat by trying to isolate women from society.

There are many ways of being anarchist, even communist-anarchist. I'm thinking that the statement that anarchism, of any kind, is a "clear understanding" of hierarchy, authority, and political and economic oppression is another overstatement, typical of Marxist dogma. It promises "the answer." I think an im-

portant anarchist assertion might suggest that no one is entirely clear about what's wrong with our society or how to fix it up. We all have some areas which we've paid more attention to and can help with but finally the responsibility for analyzing a problem and doing something about it rests with who-ever feels the pinch.

Let's watch out for the concept of caste. That word means a rigidly exclusive social class. We experience class conflict in subtler, complicated ways. Given all the undefined, guilty gobbledy-gook about the working class so current, we should be very careful with our words.

Let's watch out for personal dogmatism and purist thinking. The paper says we "must" live our lives in a revolutionary way. First of all, I bridle at the order. Secondly, I maintain that it's impossible. We were raised in nuclear families, educated by the state's schools, mesmerized by TV serials and popular songs. We carry a lot of old baggage deep in our characters. Our days find us at odds with our jobs, our grocery stores, our movies, our children, and our men. We should challenge each other when we're being less than we might but let's not insist on too much at once. Too much stress on revolutionary life-style leads to a self-consciousness which puts a political person out-of-touch with the daily concerns of most women.

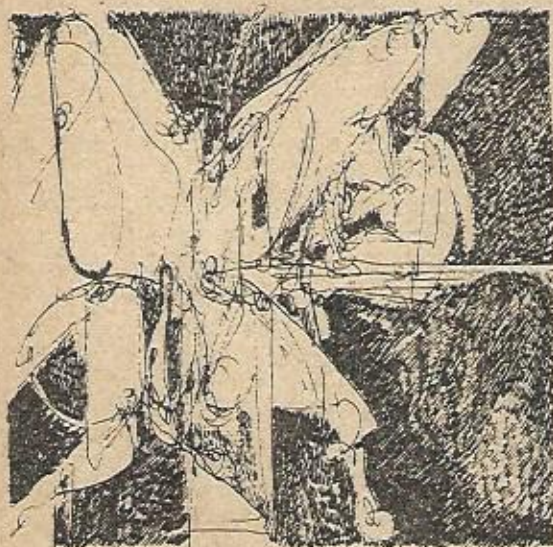
Finally, let's be specific. This is hard work. The liveliest section of the paper was the example of neighborhood common ownership. There were more concrete nouns in that sentence than most anywhere else, and it worked. Let's use our novels, poetry and music for these sources. If art is vital, let's work with it in our political statements.

We must make our ideas real and lively for each other before we can hope to move others with them. The discontent of women in this country is overpowering. Hours in front of typewriters, days in kitchens and laundromats, money and time wasted on mascara, platform heels and stained-glass window kits. Women sit lonely in parks while their children play awkwardly on boring, alien "recreation" equipment. Women stare past their children, their faces lined and vacant, or they listlessly sift through

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magazines filled with pictures of Jacqueline Onassis and recipes for asparagus casseroles when asparagus costs \$1.09 a pound, can't be found in a city grocery store, and the whole thing takes two hours anyhow. Doctors are poisoning our younger sisters with birth control pills and numbing our mothers with trances. Movies and songs sell us phoney images which we knock our brains out trying to live out. They even co-opt our own best ideas and package Erica Jong's for the amusement of liberated women. It's a rotten mess but we're still here, even optimistic sometimes.

Why? We know we're a new generation of freedom fighters, and that others have gone before us. Let's talk about our ancestors, their lives and their ideas. Let's make movies and poems, history books and pictures about cities, the way they are, the way they might be; about women's lives as they exist and as they change; about the ladies who took over the park; who sat in at the welfare department. About the new schools, the food co-ops, the taking back of the resources, the re-making of social structures. We know that the only counter for despair is involvement. Let us put forward practical proposals in a language filled with poetry and humor, and love.



ROTO-TILLERS TO VIETNAM

Over \$4000 has been raised around the state of Minnesota by showing the movie Hearts and Minds. 15 Roto-tillers have been bought and there will be a send-off from Mpls. April 30th. For more info, call International Comm. 871-1517

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unable to resolve these frustrations and then denying these feelings as they become lost in a dogma. The ruthless violence of the C.O. smacks of this process.

Early last spring the coop movement here had developed some glaring weaknesses. We had become large but were also becoming lost to cooperative ideology and spirit. People were becoming isolated in different coops and communication was suffering. There was less and less overall direction.

It was in this climate that the C.O. developed. Even if their definitions and directions were horse shit they were at least present and to some this alone lent them legitimacy. Like an earthquake the C.O. has shaken our cooperative system. In rejecting their definitions and tactics we have begun to more clearly define our own. It seems to me that there has been some definite progress towards revitalizing food coops as a radical social movement. We have had a large weekend seminar on anarchism and are planning one on non-violence. Inter-coop communication has improved tremendously with personal contacts all across the area improving along with a proliferation of printed material. Also, many of our cooperative structures have begun to become more defined as the weakness of lack of definition has been brought to bear.

At best what I have written here is an outline of what our situation has been. A detailed account of the Twin Cities coop events over the past ten months would probably involve a book. There is also much relevant analysis to be made of our situation and I have only touched on this.



letters, cont

some died, some passed away, yet some found the new way--anarchism. "people" is an abstract term. Individuals make people--not the reverse! Unless you are Marxist, then you have faith in the people's just (sic) struggle, mass movements, etc.

Finally, as for my white sexism--mind you I am not a wasp WASP but a FROG, as some racist Englishes called us in Canada. That is, French-Canadian, a member of an oppressed group. Yes, I was refused employment because of my language, ethnic background, etc. It is more subtle nowadays. This does not mean that I feel more sympathy with other French-Canadians--I feel I have a great liking if they are anarchists/libertarians, first. Then the rest follows. Concerning my sexism--show me where Emma Goldman, i.e., Red Emma, advocated feminism before her anarchist principles.

So that I can confess my errands, I am eager to do so even if I am an anarcho-individualist.

Yours unrepentantly,

R. Yves-Breton



The Twin Cities Womens Union Spring session of the Women's School begins March 29. Among a variety of course offerings is included INTRODUCTION TO ANARCHISM AND FEMINISM

Registration will be held at the Native American Center, 1530 E. Franklin, on Sunday, March 28 at 2:00 P.M. Or you can pre-register March 22-26 at 2953 Bloomington, 9:30-2:30 daily. Telephone 729-6200

There has been much interest expressed by coop people around the country as to what is happening here and how it might be affecting them. There are some widening developments from our struggle. At the midwest regional warehouse conference in February, the San Francisco Common Operating Warehouse--the primary broker for the region, declared they were a Marxist-Leninist democratic centralist organization. They were in sympathy with the C.O. and Peoples Warehouse and so were going to stop supplying DANCE. The other warehouses refused to go along with this, pledged that DANCE would get its food, and decided to drop SFCOW as their broker. This solidarity has reportedly caused great concern for SFCOW because the midwest represented from 1/4 to 1/3 of its business.

In the next issue I would like to go into what the response to the Coop Organization has been.

CAB STRIKE OVER

The cab strike is over. The Guild of Taxi Drivers and Associated Workers forced management to accept a closed shop, but the rest of the contract (whose ratification was opposed by a significant portion of Guild members) was essentially the same offered by the taxi bosses in December. Towards the end of the strike, a police agent within the union set up and busted three strikers with a pipe-gasoline bomb. The tactics of the state-capitalists alliance have not changed since the Hay-market frame-up.

One thing members of the independent Guild learned in the strike itself, is that isolated workers in Minnesota cannot beat a national company who can absorb losses (and conveniently juggle their books for tax purposes) while union workers keep working (literally scabbing) for the boss of the same company in Chicago, St. Louis and other cities. The need for Industrial Unionism, all workers in an industry in one union, all industrial unions in one big union (which the I.W.W. works for) is clear when the owners, with their union bureaucrat lackeys, pit one group of workers against another.



FINANCIAL REPORT

Support for Soil of Liberty continues to be very encouraging. Since the last issue we have taken in some \$80. Continued support in the form of new subscription is necessary. Subs are from \$3-\$4. Haymarket Press is again donating their labor to print this issue.

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**"Socialism without liberty is
the worst form of tyranny."
-M. Bakunin-**

"Anarchism is generally humanitarian only in the sense that the ideas of the masses tend to improve the lives of all (wo)men, and that the fate of today's or tomorrow's humanity is inseparable from that of the exploited labor. If the working masses are victorious, all humanity will be reobrn; if they are not, violence, exploitation, slavery and oppression will reign as before the world."--Taken from The Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists

